

T W O S E R M O N S

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PREACHED ON *694. e 11*
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A F A S T D A Y

DURING THE
LATE WAR WITH FRANCE.



L O N D O N :

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TO THE READER.

THE following papers are really what they pretend to be, genuine, and, the correction of pen slips excepted, literal copies of two sermons preached on a Fast Day during the last war.

They were found among the manuscript remains of the preacher, who was never very accurate or even careful to ascertain the æra of his performances by dates. However, it appears by the contents, that they were delivered after some, at least, of the successes which attended Mr. Pitt's administration, and probably in the year 1758 or 1759.

The preacher, in his life-time, was in low circumstances, and never sought his advancement by attaching himself to any party. He used to say he was of no side but of the gospel in church matters, and of Great Britain in politics, and by this declaration he regulated his whole practice.

They into whose hands his papers fell, did not meet with these discourses till near two months after the late fast-day ; and as it was supposed *some* admonitions in them might not be unuseful to *some* of his compatriots of the present day at this crisis, they are with that view, and no other, offered to the Public by

THE EDITOR.

TWO SERMONS, &c.

LUKE IX. 56.

The son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

IF our present business here were only to deplore the miseries of war, to mourn for those who perish in it, and otherwise suffer by it; and to intercede with Almighty God, that a speedy end might be put to the calamities it brings upon the world; the occasion would very well justify the solemnity, even without taking in those terms and conditions of peace, which have a more immediate respect to our future prosperity as a nation.

The millions that perish by the sword, whenever it pleases God to let loose that judgment in the earth, cannot be remembered without a deep commiseration of their unhappy fate; and a reflection, that surely a good and merciful God, could not intend such multitudes of his reasonable creatures for so wretched a catastrophe; and that, howsoever, in the depths of his wisdom, he may permit cruel and ambitious men to make this ravage one among another, for a season; he can never be pleased with the authors of these

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calamities.

calamities ; but will assuredly visit in due season for the blood that is shed by their means.

Men think themselves extremely wise, in projecting the means of their safety and welfare, and no man, perhaps, is so foolish, as to desire to carry his point by the way of strife and contention, or the destruction of his opposers, who can gain it upon more equitable and peaceable terms.

Accordingly when princes go out to battle one with another, it is always understood, that the protection of their subjects, and the maintenance of their rights and privileges is their aim and intention, and that if these could be supported by other means, peace would be far more eligible.

But without considering the righteousness of the claims and pretensions of different states and sovereigns, may it not be justly doubted, whether any advantages that are obtained by the most successful war of any considerable duration, will be a balance for the sufferings and the loss of those miserable thousands, at the price of whose blood those advantages are obtained ?

It is true the survivors may by these means be put in a better situation, than they would have been without them ; but who is there, that hath either bowels of mercy, or principles of religion, who would not abate a great deal of his temporal happiness and convenience, rather than purchase it by the sacrifice of an innocent fellow-creature, and particularly of a fellow-subject ?

You will say, that the advantages of a successful war are felt not only by the present generation, but by remote posterity. So indeed it might be, if worldly politicians had in their hands, either the direction of future events, or
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the administration of that providence, which disposes them to the best ends.

But the fact is indeed notoriously otherwise. The events of one war, however successful, have commonly laid the foundation for another in the next generation. And, with respect to the state of our own affairs, the greatest and most valuable of our blessings have evidently been derived to us by events and transactions, where not a sword has been drawn, nor a drop of blood has been spilt.

If succeeding generations were to be made wiser by the experience of their forefathers, they might easily see, that the ways of God are not as the ways of man; and that when men have wearied themselves in exerting their own wisdom, and their own strength, the wisdom and goodness of the great disposer of all things hath brought about events, which were unattainable by a whole age of political projects; and in the accomplishment of which human faculties and endowments had not the least merit.

What makes this blindness the more remarkable is, that the evils of war and mutual desolation prevail as much at least in christian countries, as heretofore in the regions of idolatry, or in the savage habitations of paganism in modern ages. Christians have reduced the military practice to an art and science; and are known to value themselves upon inventing the most speedy and effectual, as well as the most horrible methods of slaughtering each other.

And yet they profess themselves to be the disciples of him, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; a part of his character, which would appear to the greatest advantage, during the interval of his absence from us, if it could

but be transcribed into the dispositions, manners and policy of christian princes.

It is true, princes and governors are not always personally answerable for the evils and calamities of war. A fondness for war is often the madness of the people; the effect of national pride, a spirit of revenge, a spirit of lucre, and a thousand other wicked spirits of the same family and complexion; which by the means of popular clamors and discontents, often put governments on the unwelcome option of espousing some wrong-headed quarrel of the populace, for the sake of domestic peace; and making war abroad, that it may not break out in the bowels of their own dominions.

But whatever be the source and occasion of these wars and fightings in christian countries, the general propensity towards them, as well as the occasions and effects of them, are too visible and too deplorable a testimony, how greatly the celestial spirit of the Gospel hath failed among us; and how little either our principles or manners are directed by that pure and peaceable wisdom, which our blessed Lord left us as the surest guide to those everlasting habitations, he hath prepared for all his disciples.

As our principal business here on this and the like solemnities is supposed to be repentance and humiliation for our sins; one would imagine, that whoever thought seriously upon the subject, must immediately reflect, that this spirit of enmity should be among the foremost of our national transgressions.

But though the subject of our prayers on the occasion, and some other intimations from our superiors seem to suggest an intention of that sort, yet I am afraid there are other circumstances
which

which lead the reflections of our people another way,

Our sins, indeed, are supposed in the service of the day to have derived the calamities of war upon us. And the supposed, as well as the professed end of our repentance is, that peace may be re-established, and for this we pray.

But how? Do we pray for peace as a blessing in itself?—Do we pray for it as it is the fruit and effect of a Gospel-spirit?—Do we pray for it in compliance with the will of our heavenly master, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them?—Or should we really think, or be thankful for public peace as a blessing, on whatever terms it might be obtained?

Is not victory over our enemies a condition presupposed in the peace we pray for?—And what are the fruits and effects of victory, but misery, desolation and bloodshed; the slaughter of multitudes both of friends and foes; hunger and nakedness, violence and oppression to numbers of innocent and helpless families, added to the loss of husbands, fathers, friends and protectors, with every circumstance that can make affliction bitter, or drive poor mortals to despair and phrenzy?—

Again, what is the peace we pray for?—Is it simply a freedom from disturbance and molestation from our foreign enemies?—Is all the end we propose by it to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty?—What mean and abject notions would the man be thought to have, who should comprehend his desires of peace within these limits?—And what a multitude of articles does the peace we pray for consist of in comparison of these?—

Peace

Peace in our language implies an extensive foreign commerce, as a source of opulence, and by consequence, of avarice and luxury, of endless domestic strife and litigation, of numberless frauds and perjuries, and of a thousand immoral principles which debauch the manners and lay waste the consciences of our people: it implies ease and leisure to pursue our pleasures in a course of thoughtless dissipation, which ruins the strength of self-government, takes away the heart, and even the common sense of the upper ranks of our fellow-subjects, and destroys the industry, the sobriety, the integrity and the fear of God in the lower classes.

These, and the liberty to pursue and practise ten thousand other follies and iniquities, are what make up the popular and political notion of peace; and for the purchasing of it, there are some of us, I am afraid, who think even ten thousand lives of our countrymen, added to those who have already perished in the same quarrel, an inconsiderable sacrifice.

Still we profess ourselves to be the servants and disciples of him who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them: and it is upon that pretence we hope to be heard, at the throne of grace, and Christ himself is made the Mediator, at whose intercession alone, our religion teaches us to believe, that our prayers find access to, and acceptance with God.

If now we suppose the Almighty Father of the world to have respect to these our devotions, (and if this is not supposed, to what end are such solemnities?)—If, I say, we suppose the Almighty Father of mankind, to have respect to our devotions thus understood, and thus directed, in what light must we appear in his sight?

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—Just as the ancient Israelites did in the days of Isaiah; as men who *fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness*;—as penitents who propose by repenting of their sins that are past, to procure easier and better means and opportunities of committing still more sins, and of a still worse complexion.

So far then as these are our sentiments of peace, or our views in seeking it, we seem to be exercising a repentance which is to be repented of, and instead of bringing down a blessing upon us, laying in fresh matter of provocation towards God, who cannot be pleased with a perverseness that tends so visibly to misrepresent and disparage the most gracious and beneficent, and at the same time, the most merciful of all his dispensations.

It is not at all necessary, it would indeed be most highly uncharitable, to suppose, that all who attend these solemnities, have these views and these sentiments of the objects of them. The greater part perhaps enter not into any interesting reflections either on the state of our public affairs, or what aspect they wear with respect to our public religion. It is as much out of our province, as out of our power, to adapt the counsels of princes to the rules of Christian justice and mercy.

We are all of us, it is true, the disciples of him who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; but whatever mortification it may give some of us, to see and observe, how greatly his amiable and gracious designs are counteracted, we can do no more in our private stations, than he did, to procure them a more general and effectual regard; namely, hold forth the words
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of eternal life, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

Farther than this he pretended not to interpose himself. And after all his labours and sufferings to establish that peace on earth which the angels proclaimed at his nativity, he left the world in general as little disposed to promote it as ever; and foresaw and foretold, what history and our own experience have now convinced us of; that even his own pure and peaceable religion, would be one accidental and additional cause, among many others already subsisting, of dividing mankind, and unsheathing the sword of its pretended friends as well as of its professed enemies.

Under the unhappy influences of this spirit of division, which broke in so early upon the meek and peaceable genius of the gospel, do we now live; and herein perhaps may seem to find an apology for so much at least of our military spirit, as relates to the defence of ourselves. That is to say, to be instruments in all the mischiefs of war, without being moral accessaries to them; and without departing farther from the precepts of the gospel than an unchosen or an unwelcome necessity, if such a necessity there can be, may oblige us.

The case then in fact stands thus. The practical discourses of our Saviour being directed to his disciples, and a sort of hearers, who had no hand in the public government, appear to aim at nothing more than purifying the hearts, and regulating the manners of men in their private and personal behaviour.

Hence it has been observed, and indeed laid down for a maxim, that our Lord did not concern himself about either the principles or methods

thods of human government, but left men to frame and model these according to their own liking, or their own convenience.

A most gross error, which the very nature of the case should in reason have corrected long ago. For in countries where the governors as well as the people have been converted to Christianity, there must of course be this personal obligation upon every individual in the community, from the highest to the lowest.

Lawgivers and magistrates becoming Christians, would be equally bound by the principles of the gospel, with the meanest subject. The lawgiver in these circumstances could make or give a sanction to no laws which should be unworthy of the Christian name, without being inconsistent with his principles, and answerable to God for his deviations from his engagements. —Nor could the magistrate execute any laws, but according to the same rule.

The various corruptions of the Christian world indeed, have stood in the way of this desirable plan; nor perhaps is there now one community among all those who profess the Christian name, which hath not departed from it by a variety of imaginations which have no agreement with the gospel.

But you will say, suppose it were otherwise, and that some one state of a thousand, had in its system of laws kept up to a strict conformity to the gospel; the happy influence could reach but to that one community, and the moment it became embroiled with an unrighteous neighbour, it might possibly be forced upon measures, which the gospel of Christ would otherwise neither recommend nor countenance.

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Suppose for example, our own gracious sovereign's dispositions to peace and justice and moderation to have the best effects among the people over whom he presides, yet what will this avail, when he comes to have to do with foreign powers and potentates, who have neither justice nor moderation in them?

Desirous as he may be, to employ the most christian principles to keep himself and his neighbours in peace, the event will not depend upon himself; and the peace he seeks, and would secure, is not perhaps to be had but at the expence of an higher obligation;—the obligation of protecting his subjects from the dreadful effects of the cruelty and ambition of a neighbouring sovereign, who neither feareth God, nor regardeth man.

These, I own, are suppositions and justifications for entering into war, of which it becomes us to hope we may pretend to our full share. But whatever *that* may be, they cannot justify us for carrying on the spirit of enmity and vengeance beyond the end which may be righteously proposed.

War, however kindled, is a most complicated evil; one of the most severe visitations of the Almighty; it is a bitter cup of which all the parties concerned must in some degree taste the dregs, and from whatever justifiable necessity it arose at first, Christianity will not justify the protracting it from a spirit of malevolence and revenge.

And much less for the sake of those unrighteous acquisitions, and that fuel to vice and luxury, which there is great reason to apprehend, may be the motive of our common people for wishing the continuance of it.

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Considering things in this light, a solemnity of this nature may have great propriety.

In all public exigences, the sense of the people is generally a leading circumstance to the remedy, or the expedient required to set matters right. But the sense of the people is made up too commonly of the sentiments of some few men of particular classes, and those none of the best or wisest, but who however have the art or the authority of rendering their own opinions and reflections popular and interesting, by adapting them to the most common, at the same time the very worst of human passions, pride and avarice.

To correct these for the purposes of making men either good subjects, or good neighbours, nothing so promising as to send every man home to his own heart, and that directory of his conscience, the word of God, by which not only his present sins and misapprehensions may be discovered, but where a rule is laid down for him in future, which would effectually secure him from all deception in judging of the most plausible human projects and expedients, and teach him the true value of every principle which the wisdom of man offers as the groundwork of his judgment and conduct.

Nothing enlightens the mind and understanding so suddenly and so wonderfully, as the truths of the gospel, when let in and suffered to have their free course without controul; and if such occasions as this, would make way for the free and full reception of them, with every one who attends this day's service on the pretence of repenting of his sins, we should in a very little time see the hearts of our Israel bowed as the heart of one man; and an almost momentary

revolution in the strain of those political sentiments, with which we are apt to amuse ourselves, as if they were the very hinges upon which all our future peace and safety must turn.

But such a change is rather to be wished and prayed for, than to be expected, and the morrow will most likely bring back the very same prospects, we had before us yesterday, and the very same remarks and reflections upon them.

There is nothing more affecting to a serious mind than this general perverseness of mankind, which so commonly renders the greatest blessings of heaven and the most invaluable benefits of its dispensations, so fruitless and void.

The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; and certain it is that nothing would so effectually save men's lives, or secure their health and safety and peace so well and so substantially, as a conformity to the gospel, provided it universally prevailed.

But who sees not that the wisdom of the gospel not only counteracts, but even undervalues the wisdom of the world, to a degree of scorn and contempt? And yet the wisdom of the world, has all the vogue, and, strange to tell, it has it on the reputation of providing more speedily and more commodiously for the life and safety of man, than the wisdom of the gospel.

The event however shews, that it tends oftener to destroy men's lives than to save them.

Enmities, and hatred, and wars and fightings, dangers and distresses, oppression and fraud, and every thing which put men into the uneasy state of fear and suspicion and rivalry one towards another, are the product of worldly wisdom.

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And when these bitter fruits are brought forth either in public or private life, then appears the expedience of repentance. That is to say in other words, the expedience and indeed the necessity of individuals in the community, changing their maxims as well as their conduct; and seeking resources of a more stable happiness in the better sort of wisdom which is from above; which corrects the passions, and restrains those desires that set worldly wisdom to work; and brings down all the evils which make repentance necessary.

This, we may presume, is the view our superiors have in prescribing such services and solemnities as the present; and this is a view indeed in which they are reasonable, and may in certain cases, bid fair for answering a laudable end.

But whether this end is answered by these solemnities, or not, there is another account of more consequence to which they may be turned, concerning which I shall beg your patience, while I prosecute the subject farther in the afternoon.

 LUKE IX. 56.

The son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

REPENTANCE in any circumstances, whether public or private, implies reformation; and consequently, national repentance, implies national reformation. And this, as I have before observed, is probably the aim, and certainly the pretence of instituting solemnities of this kind.

But national reformation is a work of that difficulty, that whoever will be at the pains to consider in what it consists, and how widely the different classes and professions of men among us, have deviated from the principles, as well as the manners of the christian religion, will easily perceive, that, if the means by which it might be brought about could be resolved on, it would still be a problem, that might be debated, and perhaps never determined, where it should begin.

The reformation of national iniquity, is only to be brought about in two ways: either, 1st, by the sincere repentance and conversion of the particulars which compose the community; or, 2dly, by the interposition of civil authority, compelling men by some new ordinances and sanctions

sanctions to act righteously, whether they should be otherwise disposed to it or not.

To suppose the whole body to become wise and good all at once, and as it were by common inclination and consent, we must suppose, an extraordinary, and even an highly miraculous influence of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon them. We must suppose indeed a state of things which never happened since the times of the Apostles ; and perhaps not even then.

For when you have selected from the men of that generation, those who joined themselves to the christian churches, you will, I doubt, leave a very formidable majority behind, both of Jews and Gentiles, who paid no sort of regard to the Gospel, nor grew any better for the light it held out to them.

How such an influence may once more be dispensed in some future age, immediately previous to the second coming of the son of man, we cannot tell ; some such dispensation seems to be foretold, and perhaps may not be at the remote distance it is imagined to be.

In the mean time, the providence of God having furnished us by the publication of the Gospel, with sufficient means of knowing the will of God on this subject of repentance ; no man can plead ignorance of his condition.

But still, men are left much to themselves to employ this knowledge to the ends of their present and future happiness, as they are respectively disposed. And what has been the consequence of that, we easily perceive, by the iniquity and disorder that abounds in the christian world ; and which a right application of christian principles, should it become general, would certainly correct and reform.

But even during this state of things, God leaves not himself without witness, in many memorials of the instability of human affairs which are exhibited from time to time.

Misery and affliction are distributed among the sons of men; misery and affliction which are the genuine fruits of their own sinful devices.

Particular calamities befall particular kingdoms and countries; which shew by their complexion, the public iniquities of which they are the offspring; and call loudly upon the persons or the people more immediately affected by them; to break off their sins by righteousness, lest worse things should come upon them.

Let us apply this to our own particular case, and consider, what sentiments will be suggested to the people who are thus called upon to repent.

The calamity under which we labour is an expensive and precarious war; for the events of all wars are precarious till they are absolutely concluded. The event of this war is supposed, and the public offices of the day affirm it, to depend absolutely on the providence of God. Our national sins are however understood to have given sufficient provocation to the divine majesty, either to prolong this calamity, or to give it an issue so unsuccessful and unfavourable to us, as may be even fatal to our religion and liberties. And it is farther understood; that the wrath of God may be averted, and our re-establishment in peace and security brought about by our repentance; of which this public act may be considered as the beginning.

Now as the end and object of this repentance, is the restoration of national peace and prosperity, particular persons will consider what effects their
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own repentance will have towards attaining that end.

The sins of every private man, indeed, are ingredients in the national corruption, and to that every private sinner is, for that reason, accessory.

But I am afraid it will be remembered, that the repentance of one man, or of a few, will do very little towards abating our national transgressions. And they who are not disposed to repent or reform upon other considerations, will hardly be induced to do it upon the precarious hopes of saving the public from the effects of a general corruption, to which there are such multitudes of contributors, very few of whom, it is next to a certainty, will ever think of repenting from any such motive, or perhaps from any motive at all.

And he who will not repent to save himself from hell in another world, will hardly be so public-spirited, as to give up one of the least of his sins, upon the feeble encouragement of stemming that torrent of iniquity, which is supposed to endanger the public prosperity in this.

Thus hopeless and desperate is the voluntary concurrence of the body of our people, in any measures of reformation which depend upon every man's personal acts of repentance.

It remains then to be considered, how public reformation, and in consequence of that, our public welfare may be promoted by the interposition of the civil powers.

Much has been said of this from different quarters, and great expectations raised, or at least many surmises thrown out, of what might have been, or what might still be done towards correcting or restraining the iniquities of the present

generation, provided our civil governors would set about it in good earnest.

Why they have not done it, or why they still linger to do it, various reasons have been given, and various conjectures offered; out of which every man may amuse himself with that which pleases him best.

But this is certain, that as often as the higher powers have thought it necessary to answer for themselves, their constant allegation is, that the times will not bear the reformation in question; and that should they attempt it, in those instances where the offences are most flagrant, they might expect the rudest and most insolent opposition.

Perhaps it may be imagined, that as reformation would be a public blessing, no government would be without the necessary assistance of all parties who are interested in its preservation for their own sakes.

But when you come to consider the several sorts and degrees of evils which prevail among different classes and orders of men, you will presently perceive, that to keep things in their present train, will be made a common cause, and raise up opposition even from those, to whom, perhaps, some articles of reformation might be both desirable and beneficial.

Men of all professions have some particular craft by which they obtain their wealth; which would be far from enduring the test, if it were to stand or fall by the rules of righteousness; and which whenever it is in danger of being set at nought, alarms their jealousy, and makes them watchful against all approaches towards a reformation.

If government shou'd begin with the most flagrant of these, a question is immediately suggested, where

where will all this end?—If this point is carried, our rulers may go on to another. The reformation in question may come to bear hard upon our own particular interests, and the surest way to prevent that, is to oppose it in the beginning.

Thus have we seen it in some late, as well as in many former instances, where tragical clamours have been raised against the civil powers, about the imaginary consequences of public measures, which all wise and good men were convinced, were necessary; but which, however, by the art and noise of a few popular orators, misleading the judgment, and inflaming the passions of the very lowest of the people, have been effectually disappointed.

Insomuch that if the most righteous sovereign that our imaginations can describe, should attempt, in a state of things like the present, to model his government upon the genuine principles of christianity, he would just run the same hazard of exposing himself to the rebellion of his own subjects, as he would do to wars and depredations of another kind, should he act upon the same principles with foreign potentates who pay no regard to them.

The consequence from these premises is but too visible, that all hopes of any real and lasting public reformation, are vain and void of foundation. And yet how few of us suspect it?—Or how few will believe it when it is declared unto them?

These solemnities look well, and have a plausible end; and many things are said and preached on these occasions, which seem to shew the very good account to which they turn among us.

But where do we find this account, in any substantial improvement of the manners of our people? What fruits that are worth the gathering,

do we observe to be brought forth in the intervals between one and another of these solemn appointments?

So far indeed, are we from any such edification, that they who take but a very superficial view of the state of things among us, with a moderate share of the fear of God in their hearts, will presently perceive, that if the sovereign ruler and judge of the world, did not keep the balance of government in his own hand, by interposing events, and raising up particular instruments, independent of all human counsels, we must have sunk into ruin and oblivion long ago, merely by the wicked and destructive tendency of our own devices.

In the mean time these circumstances of the world to serious and contemplative minds, are comfortable admonitions that God will never be wanting to his own dispensations; and that the present interposition of his providence in correcting and restraining the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, is a certain pledge, that when the ends of that providence are answered upon earth, a more equal account will be taken, and all those disorders and irregularities in the world, which for the present, may tempt the fool to say in his heart, there is no God, will be fully adjusted, and the glory of God, and the truth of his religion, illustrated, by rendering to every soul of man according to his deeds.

The son of man came not, the first time, to destroy men's lives, not the lives of most wicked and disobedient men, but to save them. His first appearance was not for judgment, but salvation.

When he comes in the character of a judge, the hour of trial and probation will be over. His errand will not then be what it was in the days

days of his flesh, to teach men love and mercy, peace and patience, long suffering and self-denial; but to enquire and examine, how far every man in his station and province, has followed his steps in the example he hath left us.

Let no man wonder then, that we are not destroyed and swallowed up by the progress and issue of our wickedness. These are the days of the long suffering of God, by which he means to bring all men to the knowledge of the truth, and to an effectual repentance.

Just as little reason, on the other hand, is there to value ourselves, or to be exalted by our public successes against our public enemies.

They demand our thanksgivings indeed, as they promise a longer interval to us, to see and rectify our mistakes, and to recommend ourselves more effectually to the favour of God, by restoring peace and truth and righteousness to their proper esteem and influence among our people.

But he who looks upon conquest and victory and political acquisitions, as public blessings, independent of these considerations, knows not what manner of spirit he is of.

“ God, says Peter, is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.”

This the apostle speaks of as a peculiar circumstance in the evangelical dispensation; and consequently, as a standing maxim in Christianity to the end of time; and what the apostle here mentions of the divine impartiality with respect to men of different nations, is just as true of the nations themselves.

The Son of man, to whom the Father hath committed all judgment, and for that purpose hath given him power over all flesh, has no peculiar,

culiar, no selected family, as the Jews were, to distinguish from the rest of mankind.

His view was to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him: and the final acceptance of these, does not depend upon the circumstance of country or climate, but upon the personal holiness of the man himself.

There is a prejudice, an honest prejudice, no doubt, in favour of our country, which, when directed to a proper end, is highly to be applauded and cherished. But it is a prejudice which may be too apt to draw men into a very wrong and mistaken judgment, namely, that when success attends our counsels or our arms, we and our allies are the only favourites of heaven, and all our adversaries in a state of reprobation.

If men ever consider state-events along with principles of religion, I doubt it is too frequently in this dim light, and with these narrow conceptions.

I would recommend it to those who may look forward with exultation and triumph on the state of humiliation and disability to which the adversary with whom we have more immediately to do, may be supposed now, and may be in human probability hereafter farther reduced:—I say I would recommend it to these sanguine people to recollect, in what situation we ourselves were, on some of the very last occasions which called us to such solemnities as this.

Who will be our security, that a sudden turn of affairs may not bring us back to the same disagreeable circumstances? — Who can command the winds and the seas, not to mention other natural causes, on which so much of our success is likely to depend?

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In every nation under heaven, and particularly in every Christian nation, there are, without all doubt, numbers who fear God and work righteousness, and who have as warm hearts, and as eager wishes for the good of their country, as they who are the warmest and the most eager among ourselves.

Let us suppose some of these to expostulate with us in the words of the prophet.—“ Re-
 “ joyce not against me, O mine enemy; when
 “ I fall, I shall arise. When I sit in darkness,
 “ the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will
 “ bear the indignation of the Lord, because I
 “ have sinned against him, untill he plead my
 “ cause, and execute judgment for me. He
 “ will bring me forth to the light, and I shall
 “ behold his righteousness.” *

Were not these, do you suppose, the sentiments, and these the devotions of many pious men among us, when things went ill with ourselves?—And hath Almighty God given us any mark of distinction by which we may discern that one Christian people hath a right to this confidence in his mercy and righteousness, rather than another?

But you will say, our enemies have a bad cause.

Let it be granted they have. And yet it was in the support of this very cause, that they gained so many advantages against us in the progress of this very war.

And I know not what conclusion can be drawn from events, which are so balanced between contending parties, but that Almighty God in his providence sees fit oftentimes to chastise

* Micah vii. 8, 9.

tise one wicked people by the hand of another; and for any improvements we have made, or any we are likely to make under his former corrections, the chastisement may as soon come to *our* turn once more, as fall any where else.

Religion indeed may be supposed to be part of the present quarrel. And it must be acknowledged, that what our enemies would impose upon us under that name, is perhaps, upon a comparison with the genuine gospel, the grossest and most abject superstition that ever was propagated in the world.

But what advantage have we here? If our forms and principles are in greater agreement with Christianity than theirs; what are our manners and our practices?—Who has discernment enough to perceive, or confidence enough to affirm, that our virtue, sobriety and temperance; our mercy and righteousness in private and commercial life, rises as much higher than theirs, as our religious system is supposed to excel that which they profess?

The greatest part of their unhappy people have an incurable blindness to plead; a prejudice instilled into their minds by the most tempting artifices; and maintained there by the most prevailing terrors that can be imagined. And the very most of them, if they are not good Christians, are at least good Papists.

But if we have any real right to the preference we pretend to, we cannot be good Protestants, without being good Christians. And whether we have respect to the favour of God in this or another world, where the acceptance will light upon the comparison, we cannot be ignorant, as our Lord hath stated the case so clearly between those who knew, and those who did not know
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their master's will; between those who were incurably blind and pretended to no sight of their own, but put themselves under the absolute direction of others, and those who said they saw.

Upon the whole then, we may from these considerations gather, what sort of repentance it is that this solemnity will most seasonably suggest, and which may be most effectually exercised in consequence of it. The personal repentance and conversion of every man for himself; and that, not so much in view of what may be obtained by it for the public, as to secure our own everlasting happiness in the world to come.

A single man can hardly be supposed to do much good to the public by his repentance, unless he could repent for others as well as himself; and what good can possibly arise to the public from such repentance, will certainly accrue to it, with no less advantage, where the motive is the salvation of souls in another life, as where it is esteemed the procuring cause of larger portions of felicity in this.

“The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” If we will not allow this consideration to have its weight and its operation in our politics, let us consider that the gracious design of saving men's lives, which this blessed Son of man came to execute, had not its accomplishment in the present world.

The lives which he came to save, were to be immortal lives: and the securing of this immortality, happily depends upon no human politics.

Men, by counteracting the precepts of Christ, by raising and fomenting wars and miseries and persecutions, and by various kinds of cruelty and

oppression, may shorten each other's bodily lives.

But the saving to every man that eternal life, for which Christ came into the world, depends upon nothing but the application of the means he left us for that purpose; and these means every man may apply, in spite of all inconveniences, and all the opposition which an evil and sensual world can give to his endeavours.

I hope I have shewn an obligation upon every christian man to follow the example of our Lord in saving the lives of his fellow-creatures, even supposing life in this text to mean no more than a temporal being or existence in this world. And from the same principles it certainly follows, that severe will be the final visitation of those, by whose iniquity the blood of man is shed, in so great abundance, and to answer so few good purposes.

But of how much sorer punishment will they be thought worthy, through whose offence or instigation, the eternal life of his brother is destroyed?

A man may think himself happy, and doubtless is happy, whose temper, profession, or circumstances in life, have placed him out of the way of this work of slaughter.

Who that has the heart of a man, would willingly have it oppressed with the weight of blood shed by his hand, whatever might be the cause?—And yet how many of these causes are there, where the strictest human casuists impute no guilt?

But is the same man always so tender of the eternal life either of himself or of his fellow?

Is he a minister of the Gospel, and can he calmly see his flock scattered and wandering to
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seek their spiritual food where they can find it; or led astray by vice and error, without crying aloud to them to return, and giving them seasonable and affecting warnings of their danger?

If he can, he must have an heart little sensible of that terrible sentence, that where the unwarned wicked man dieth in his iniquity, his blood will be required at the unfaithful watchman's hand.

Is he a magistrate, a minister of God to the people for their good, and to execute wrath upon them that do evil?—And can he with patience hear the public profanation of the name of God?—Can he see the open scandals of drunkenness, brawling and debauchery of several kinds, and will not his compassion for the souls of those who are infected with these vices, or corrupted by them, move him to correct and restrain them? Or can he lend his countenance and authority to open a door of everlasting ruin and destruction to those miserable numbers, whose attachment to licentious and riotous pleasures hurry them into the snares and depths of Satan, without fear or shame?

Is he a parent, and can he suffer his children's minds to lie idle, uncultivated, and unseasoned with the nurture and admonition of the Lord; exposed to every temptation and to every sinful seducer, into whose way their ignorance or indiscretion may lead them? Can he suffer them to mispend those precious portions of time, when they should learn to remember, honour, and revere their Creator, and which he himself hath consecrated for that purpose, in idleness and folly, and in every profane and irreligious practice which leadeth them into eternal destruction?—

If it is a cruelty to put an end to the life of a human creature in this world, which is commonly

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chequered with pain and misery, among its portions of happiness, how much greater is the barbarity to deprive him of his eternal life, where his happiness would be endless, and to sink him into the pit of destruction, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?

And yet this every one does, or at least to this every one contributes, who is in any degree accessory by his exhortation, example, his advice or counsel, his neglect and indolence, to the propagation of those corruptions which prevail among us, and take away the hearts of our people, and which, having to so great a degree, first banished the fear of God from their minds, threaten to embolden them, in no long time, to despise all human as well as divine laws, and confound all those distinctions of station and quality, upon which human policy and human ambition put so high a value.

These are really and truly objects of every man's sincere and deep humiliation; and few of us, I am afraid, would not find, upon examination, that he or they had not something to answer for on this score, and many of us a great deal.

And therefore, that this may prove an hour of consideration to us all, suggesting and forwarding a repentance not to be repented of, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

F I N I S.

